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Garrett: Consular ID Cards Place National Security in Hands of Foreign Governments

WASHINGTON, D.C. – When an American citizen applies for any form of bank account in the U.S., the financial institution can usually access enough data to verify their identity with a high degree of confidence. This is not the case with people from countries where records of identification may be sparse and hard to access, such as in Mexico.

Before 2001, for example, it was difficult for illegal immigrants from Mexico to obtain U.S. bank accounts. Then Mexico began issuing “matricula consular” cards to allow illegal aliens to prove their identities. Boosted by strong promotional efforts by the Embassy of Mexico and its 45 consulates in the U.S., the matricula consular card is now accepted as a form of ID at 74 of the nation's 9,000 banks.

Resembling a driver's license and displaying the bearer's supposed address in the United States, the cards are issued by Mexican consulates to Mexican citizens, whether or not they are legally in this country. The Mexican government has successfully lobbied many states and local government and businesses to accept matricula consular identification cards used by Mexican nationals living in the U.S. to establish identity, cash checks and open bank accounts.

The recent push by Mexican consulates for the acceptance of these cards in the U.S., poses a serious legal, financial and national security liability. Acceptance of the cards, or our cooperation in their manufacture or distribution, provides unspoken approval and encouragement for increased illegal immigration into the United States. This is true because no one needs these cards except persons residing here illegally. Illegal aliens are relying on these matricula consular cards as a means to add legitimacy to their illegal status.

Aside from aiding and abetting illegal immigration, acceptance of the consular ID cards is placing American security matters in the hands of foreign governments. Matricula consular cards allow non-citizens who are in the U.S. illegally to utilize documents issued by a foreign government with the intended purpose of bypassing U.S. security laws. The laws that Members of Congress set up to protect financial institutions and prevent identity theft, fraud and money laundering are weakened because of the absolute absence of control or authority of the U.S. in the issuance of foreign identity documents.

To help address this problem, I introduced legislation, H.R. 3674, the Financial Customer Identification Verification Improvement Act, which will prohibit the use of identification cards issued by foreign governments, including matricula consular cards, for purposes of verifying the identity of a person who opens an account at a financial institution.

Easy access to banking and financial institutions was one of the critical weaknesses in our system exploited by terrorists on September 11th. This practice must be stopped.

There's no way around the fact that consular ID cards are only needed by people who aren't legally in the U.S. in the first place. Every legal non-citizen should possess identity documents issued by the U.S. government, such as a valid visa or a passport. Businesses or communities that accept any other form of ID from legal aliens as valid are turning their back on legal immigration and our nation's national security.

On the tragic day of September 11th, we received a wake-up call that something must be done to protect and secure America's core identity documents. The American people were shocked to learn that 18 of the 19 terrorists possessed either state-issued or counterfeit driver's licenses or ID cards, and all 19 had obtained Social Security numbers - some real, some fake.

Ironically, any developments made after 9/11 to secure identity documents are being undercut by the matricula consular card issued by the government of Mexico, the specific intent of which is to gain privileges and benefits previously reserved for citizens and legal immigrants, for an estimated five million Mexicans residing illegally here in the U.S.

Because of the growing acceptance of the matricula consular cards, several other foreign governments are preparing to issue similar cards to their own citizens living illegally here – including Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Poland and Peru. It is highly likely that many other governments will soon join them. The growing use of such cards would further take U.S. national security matters, identity verification and other crucial issues out of U.S. government control.

In this heightened security environment, we cannot afford to allow such negligence when it comes to our national security, immigration and border control. Allowing for illegal aliens to use matricula consular cards undermines immigration policy and weakens the

very mechanisms that Congress put into effect after 9/11 to safeguard American businesses and financial institutions against fraud and abuse.

My bill works to discourage illegal immigration and protect our national security by ending the use of matricula consular cards for identification purposes and preventing financial institutions to funnel terrorist money. We must protect our borders, our banks and financial institutions, and uphold our immigration laws.

Rep. Scott Garrett (NJ-05) represents portions of northern New Jersey including Bergen, Sussex, Warren and Passaic counties.

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